

Open Letter

October 4, 2012

Elections: One of Four Pillars

The United States stands united with all Malians in the desire to see the North fully reunited with the rest of the country. Our support for the territorial integrity and secular nature of Mali is without reservation or hesitation. Recent press coverage of our policy as only focused on elections are not accurate and oversimplify a complex response to a complex crisis. We firmly believe that the best and quickest way to accomplish the reprise of the North is by pursuing four things simultaneously as part of one united strategy: negotiations to address fundamental issues in the North with those Malians who embrace a secular and unified state; preparation for a military intervention to dislodge extremists; movement toward elections as soon as possible and with as many people in Mali as possible; , and continued humanitarian relief.

First and foremost, the United States supports talks with certain groups in the North based on the unchanging principles of one country that is secular in nature, but open to understanding the economic and social needs of Malian citizens throughout the country. Such an approach provides an opportunity for Malian citizens in the North to choose peace over war, reconciliation over continued bloodshed, and concrete efforts for economic development instead of international isolation. Each person willing to leave the extremist or rebel camp by negotiation constitutes a victory for Mali that simplifies the struggle that might follow with those who reject Mali's integrity and tradition of tolerance and peace.

At the same time, it is prudent and necessary to begin military reconstruction, training, and planning as soon as possible in order to have a compelling military option for action and deterrence. Malians in the North deserve the quickest possible victory, to minimize their exposure to the chaos and destruction of war. This means the army and its plans must be very well prepared , accepting the hand of support offered by its neighbors and the international community. While our legislation prevents us from providing direct military support to the Government of Mali before elections, the United States is working with ECOWAS, the UN, neighboring countries, and the international community to address the security needs of Mali and the region.

The United States does stress the importance of continuing to prepare for elections to be held as soon as possible and in as much of the country as possible. Every element of Mali's government, political system, and civil society should be making every effort to ensure fair and free elections are being prepared. Elections would bring about some very important, concrete changes to move Mali toward a quicker resolution of the suffering of northern Malians and permit fuller engagement from partners, including the U.S. An elected president would also provide a clear interlocutor for working with the UN, ECOWAS, and partner nations in support of Mali's interests. Having an elected president would bring constancy and strength to Mali's governance at a critical moment in Malian history.

Some Malians I have talked to express fears that an election without full participation by the citizens in the North would not be seen as legitimate. But I am completely confident in the long, rich history and culture of the Malian people. You have centuries of experience in governance, consensus building, and

tolerance to support you through these trials. Your renowned dedication and devotion to family and community has resulted in care for displaced populations. These traits are some of the things I most treasure and admire about Mali, and part of what makes you the great nation that you remain. Whether internally displaced Malians vote outside of the North or negotiations free more territory to participate, Northerners can and will be able to make their voices heard.

One final element—humanitarian and development aid—is absolutely essential as the others are addressed. The United States, along with countries all over the world, international organizations, and NGOs, responded decisively when the need became known. Even while contributing over \$378 million this year to address the food crisis in the Sahel as a region, nearly \$92 million has gone to meet the humanitarian needs of Malians—both in Mali and in refugee camps in neighboring countries. The United States is also providing approximately \$70 million in development assistance to address the critical health and food security needs of the Malian people. Be assured that the people and the government of the United States are proud to be a part of this humanitarian response, and that we also stand by your side as you undertake the vital actions of strengthening security, participating in vital negotiations with your fellow Malians in the North, and preparing for elections vital to the future democratic, economic, social, and security progress of your country.